

# Sewagescapes: Urban Growth and Topography of Sewage Districts in Central Illinois

Anastasia Ervin

Junior Illinois State Undergraduate

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Faculty Mentor: Dr. Kathryn Sampeck- Department of Sociology and  
Anthropology

# Introduction

- Studied three sewage districts in Central Illinois
  - Bloomington-Normal Water Reclamation District (1919, 1928, 2005)
  - Urbana & Champaign Sanitary District (1921, 1924, 1968)
  - Sangamon County Water Reclamation District (1924, 1929, 1973)

For more information about the locational aspects of the sewage districts: Copy and Paste this link into a new browser tab:  
<https://bit.ly/2Zba1PY>



Destination 360, "Illinois Map," 2006,  
<http://www.destination360.com/north-america/us/illinois/illinois-map>

# Objectives

- Infrastructure is important in considering urban growth, but is often overlooked in social science studies
- Examining the range of factors, in this case economic growth, that have historically guided urban growth can help explain the way cities are structured today, specifically in terms of economic status.
- Examining the topography of land owned by the districts allowed for analysis of the messages the districts attempt to communicate within the topography and use of the land



# Method

This research analyzed sewage districts through the lens of **landscape archaeology**



Sangamon County Water Reclamation District, photograph, [Sangamon County Water Reclamation District \(spfldmetro.com\)](https://www.spfldmetro.com).

## What is landscape archaeology?

- It sees land as part of a physical remnant of the past
- By studying the landscape, we can see how past entities have used it for communication purposes
  - This includes power structures that communicate divisions of:
    - Economic structures
    - Social structures
    - Political structures

## Economic Value

- Analyzed Bloomington and Urbana, IL
- Compared the 1940 census and the 2019/2020 Assessed Home Values

## Topography

- Used historical records including:
  - Newspaper articles
  - The Illinois Association of Sewage Districts conference reports 1924-1959

## Economic Factors      Results      Topography

- For a full detail of the results of the economic analysis, copy and paste this link in a new browser tab:  
<https://bit.ly/37q98HE>
- Conclusions are on the next slide

- All the districts studied underwent beautification efforts during the 20<sup>th</sup> century
- These efforts continue through the modern day in the placement of the districts near “natural” or “green” areas such as parks
- For example, The Bloomington-Normal Water Reclamation District’s newest plant is partially a nature sanctuary

Rock Garden, Bloomington and Normal, Ill., Sanitary District



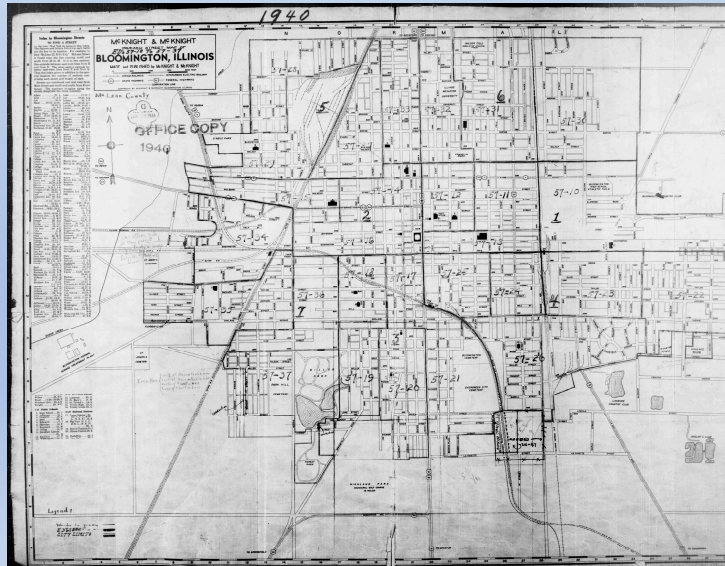
A postcard showing the Bloomington-Normal Water Reclamation District Rock Garden. Permission to use granted by the Bloomington-Normal Water Reclamation District.



# Conclusion

## Economic Value of Neighborhoods

- It is the proximity to active industrial areas that is the primary determinant in the economic status of a neighborhood
- This can be supplemented by the elevation of the land



1940 Census  
Enumeration Map for  
Bloomington, Illinois.  
(National Archives, The  
Official 1940 Census  
Website)

## Topography and Location

The sewage districts are able to use their **power over** the landscape to create an attractive front.



The attractiveness and cleanliness of the landscaping divorces the district from their association with 'dirt'

- Mary Douglas' 1966 study shows 'dirt' as a result of **context**



Thus, the landscape gives **power to** the districts to influence public opinion.

Douglas, Mary. 1966. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. New York: Frederick A Praeger, Inc., Publishers.